

Election...from Page 1A

and liquor by the drink in its next election. Whether it will have a referendum on allowing package stores is up to 35 percent of registered voters, and whether or not they sign the petition.

City Clerk Cenlya Galloway said that it appears as though the city will hold the election on Nov. 8

"Tentative dates for the qualifying will be that last week in August," she said.

Galloway plans to have information on the early voting dates at the City Council meeting next month.

Dave Davis gave a presentation on the possibility of sponsoring benches for the new Mayor's Park. The idea is that anyone who wants to have a bench put it in honor, memory, or support of someone and could pay to have it installed in Mayor's park.

"I have been in contact with a bench company called Belson. They are very beautiful benches. I've already had five commitments. I'm going after \$1,000 a bench and I've

already got five," he said. "On each bench that someone sponsors, we have a company called International Bronze, that does memorial plaques or sponsor plaques. They do up to four lines or you can have your own stylized however you want it. They vary in price. So when I take a donation for a bench, I've got to keep that in mind when I quote a price for the bench," he added.

"I think it only fair that the first people who come up and the first people to sponsor the bench gets to pick where it goes."

Nina Kurrimbukus, general manager at Le Parisien Café, gave a presentation on her new French restaurant opening where Michael Lee's used to be.

Council member Liz Ordiales sparked a discussion on the political infrastructure of the city.

"I'd like to talk about having a discussion about establishing term limits for elected officials. Any elected

official should have some kind of term limits," said Liz Ordiales. "I'd like to explore the possibility of putting term limits on our elections."

It was decided that the rules governing term limits would have to be changed in the city charter, if that is something the city decides to pursue.

After the city manager's report, the council turned to motions, resolutions, and ordinances.

The first reading of the motion to adopt an ordinance approving 2016 fines and fees in Hiwassee Municipal Court and the resolutions authorizing the surplus and sale of the 2004 Ford Explorer and 2002 Chevrolet used by the Water Department passed. The motion to rescind the current council rules for the conduct of Hiwassee Council and committee meetings and to adopt a 2016 protocol for public speaking was amended to be discussed at a work session on the last Tuesday of the month.

The motion to improve the Hiwassee City Square also passed.

Thomas...from Page 1A

concerns.

My tenure as CEO of Windstream began in December 2014. Since that time, we have worked tirelessly on a comprehensive overhaul of the entire company's network and processes. Windstream is on a different strategic path today

and we have already made significant progress in Georgia and the Ninth Congressional District. This progress comes despite the rural nature of the area, which makes it physically and economically challenging to deliver high-speed Internet and voice services. I know well

these small, rural communities because they are similar to the one where I was raised in Central Illinois and that Windstream serves across the country.

The following tables show Windstream's strong record of investment in recent years, as well as the results that it is producing:

Georgia			
	2014	2015	2016*
Network Investment	\$18M	\$63M	\$38M (estimated)
Speed Capabilities	3 Mbps+ Capable: 84% 10 Mbps+ Capable: 56% 20 Mbps+ Capable: 16%	3 Mbps+ Capable: 91% 10 Mbps+ Capable: 75% 20 Mbps+ Capable: 40%	3 Mbps+ Capable: 95% 10 Mbps+ Capable: 84% 20 Mbps+ Capable: 48%

Georgia Ninth Congressional District			
	2014	2015	2016*
Speed Capabilities	3 Mbps+ Capable: 91% 10 Mbps+ Capable: 61% 20 Mbps+ Capable: 21%	3 Mbps+ Capable: 95% 10 Mbps+ Capable: 77% 20 Mbps+ Capable: 40%	3 Mbps+ Capable: 97% 10 Mbps+ Capable: 86% 20 Mbps+ Capable: 46%

*All 2016 speed capabilities are projected based on current funded plans

The facts speak for themselves but I will restate some of the accomplishments of our employees in Georgia and, in particular, those who call North Georgia their home. I know they share the pride I feel about their hard work in the last year, and their continuing efforts in 2016. Here are a few highlights:

In 2015, Windstream investment surged to more than \$60 million – triple the amount of the previous year. This investment supported upgrades to every part of the network – from neighborhood network nodes, to regional network facilities, to the cables that connect it all together.

In recent years in the Ninth District and Georgia as a whole, we have converted nearly all of our middle mile plant to fiber and upgraded the electronics to work with these new fiber facilities. As a result, 97 percent of the customers in your district are now served by a fiber-fed node for their broadband, which will eliminate back-haul congestion.

With this investment and our upgraded plant, we now offer faster speeds (10-100 Mbps) to 77 percent of the locations we serve in the Ninth Congressional District. Moreover, 40 percent of the locations can get at least 20 Mbps.

95 percent of the households in the Ninth Congressional District can receive at least three Mbps Internet service from Windstream. We expect that coverage to expand to 97 percent by end of 2016. The remaining households are located at such a distance from our network that it would be cost prohibitive to upgrade their service.

Although it is substantially more expensive to serve rural areas like the Ninth District, we charge the same

prices throughout Georgia and the rest of the nation.

We have accomplished a lot in the past several years, but we are not satisfied to stop here -- our work continues in 2016. In the Ninth Congressional District, the Windstream team has already completed work on an additional 53 sites in the first 56 days of 2016, to deliver faster and more reliable connections to more than 5,000 customers. As these efforts continue, we will end 2016 with fewer than two percent of our customers served by middle mile copper facilities and 86 percent of households in your district capable of receiving 10 Mbps or faster high-speed Internet service.

Throughout 2016, we will continue to deploy technology with new capabilities, including software that extends our faster speeds further in the network. In addition, we will continue our work with major online providers to position their computer servers in local Windstream facilities, so that high-bandwidth traffic can reach end users faster and with less disruption to other customers.

The spinoff in 2015 of some of our facilities to a Real Estate Investment Trust has helped us make these investments. As we said when we announced our plan, the spinoff enabled us to reduce our debt (which makes the company healthier so it can do more for our customers) and increase our investment in our network. Our substantial investments in Georgia and your district would not have been possible otherwise.

But our customers need more than technical performance. I also will work with our North Georgia team to stand up the following three initiatives, aimed at delivering a much improved service experience:

Communication -- We

will pursue broader customer outreach initiatives to ensure that more households become aware of new speed tiers in their local area. This outreach will include local advertising, direct communications to upgrade-eligible households, and more frequent announcements when upgrade work is completed.

Local Leadership -- I will appoint a President of Georgia Operations to ensure a single point of accountability as we work to deliver on our commitment to excellence. In addition to a primary focus on operations, this executive will work in tandem with our Government Affairs team to respond swiftly to concerns and questions of you and other officials.

Rapid Response Team -- Finally, I will establish a team, based in Cornelia, to respond specifically to any Ninth District customers who contact your office. Individuals who believe their needs have not been addressed should contact this team directly at 706-894-1330. Customers may also visit any of our local retail locations in Blairsville, Dahlonega, Cleveland, Commerce, or Cornelia. Our retail associates stand ready to support the needs of our customers between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

I again want to emphasize Windstream's commitment to servicing the needs of the communities of North Georgia. We are proud to serve the Ninth Congressional District and rural communities across Georgia. Should you be interested in learning more, I would also like to renew my previous invitation to schedule an in-person meeting or a follow-up phone call.

Respectfully,
Tony Thomas

FEMA...from Page 1A

snow that I ever recalled was on March 13, 1993. We had more than a foot of snow and were without power for two weeks.

"With the Hazard Mitigation Grant, we would probably be eligible for funding for our Emergency Operations Center, to equip it with alternative power and a generator, or big screen TVs where when we activate our EOC, we can have all this information displayed. We have a wonderful EOC, but it needs some upgrades and some additional equipment."

Mathis said that without the combined efforts of all the emergency services, Towns County may not have gotten any funding.

"There were only three North Georgia counties that got this declaration: Gilmer, Fannin

and Towns," said Mathis. "Everything else was in South Georgia. I just think it was a tremendous team effort of every county department. The commissioner's office, the sheriff's department, the fire department and the emergency medical services -- you don't get these type of declarations unless you've got everybody working together."

The cities of Hiwassee and Young Harris, should they attempt to collect FEMA funds for damages, will have to file separately from the county, as will the Towns County Water Authority.

According to the release issued by the Office of the Press Secretary at www.whitehouse.gov, "federal funding is available to state and eligible local governments and certain

private nonprofit organizations on a cost-sharing basis for emergency work and the repair or replacement of facilities damaged by the severe storms and flooding in the counties of:

"Baker, Carroll, Chattahoochee, Crawford, Dade, Decatur, Douglas, Fannin, Fayette, Gilmer, Greene, Haralson, Harris, Jeff Davis, Lamar, Macon, Marion, Meriwether, Montgomery, Morgan, Muscogee, Newton, Oglethorpe, Pickens, Stewart, Talbot, Taliaferro, Taylor, Towns, Troup, Upson, Webster, and Wilkes.

"Federal funding is also available on a cost-sharing basis for hazard mitigation measures statewide."

Indicted...from Page 1A

the time of his arrest in early February by the Union General Inc. Board of Directors, and his employment was terminated a month to the day later on March 4. Heaton, a member of the board of directors at the time of his Union County arrest, was suspended from that board.

Both now are no longer associated with Union General Hospital in any capacity.

The board hired Lewis Kelley as the CEO of both Union General Hospital and Chatuge Regional Hospital, said Board Chair Patsy Efrid.

Gowder was charged in Union County with three counts of fraudulently obtaining a controlled substance, one count

of conspiracy; Dr. Heaton was charged with 40 counts of unauthorized distribution and dispensation of controlled substances, one count of conspiracy.

Also charged in Union County, Mike Gowder's brother David Gowder, on 36 counts of fraudulently obtaining a controlled substance, seven counts of unauthorized distribution and dispensation of controlled substances; his wife Gail Gowder on two counts of fraudulently obtaining a controlled substance; his niece, Jamie Harkins on two counts of fraudulently obtaining a controlled substance, one count of conspiracy; his sister,

Virginia Harkins, on two counts of fraudulently obtaining a controlled substance, one count of conspiracy.

Sheriff Palmer wanted to thank the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigations Drug Division Unit, the Union County Sheriff's Office, and the United States Drug Enforcement Administration for partnering with the Cherokee County, NC, Sheriff's Office on this investigation.

Union County Sheriff Mack Mason said that the investigation remains ongoing, and that he's proud of being able to partner with so many agencies during the course of this continuing investigation

Kelley...from Page 1A

of then hospital CEO Mike Gowder.

Kelley's focus has been maintaining business as usual, communicating with hospital employees and the community, and assuring the high quality of care standards.

"We are blessed to have Lewis' steady hands on the wheel, as well as his deep knowledge of our facilities, this community and region," said Efrid.

"Our primary responsibility as stewards of this hospital and its related facilities are to ensure continuing operations, and maintain the high quality of care," Board Vice Chair Jim Williams said.

Gowder was placed on paid administrative leave by the Union General Inc. board at the time of his arrest on drug charges in Union County in early February.

Dr. James Heaton, then a

member of the Union General Inc. Board of Directors, was suspended from that board at the time of his arrest on drug charges in Union County in early February.

Gowder was charged in Union County with three counts of fraudulently obtaining a controlled substance, and one count of conspiracy; Heaton was charged with 40 counts of unauthorized distribution and dispensation of controlled substances, and one count of conspiracy.

Dr. Heaton, also indicted in North Carolina for drug trafficking, no longer is affiliated with the Union General medical staff, and no longer is a member of the Union General Hospital Inc. Board of Directors, Efrid said.

Furthermore, Dr. David Gowder, a former board member and emergency room physician at Union General Hospital, is

no longer associated with the Union General medical staff, Efrid said.

Dr. David Gowder also was arrested in Union County on Feb. 4 on 36 counts of fraudulently obtaining a controlled substance, and seven counts of unauthorized distribution and dispensation of controlled substances, Union County Jail records show.

Last year's April 1 arrest of Dr. David Gowder in Blue Ridge for fraudulently obtaining prescription drugs sparked an investigation by the Union County Sheriff's Office, which led to the involvement of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration, as well as law enforcement agencies in three states, including Georgia, according to the Union County Sheriff's Office.

This investigation led to the arrests of both Mike and David Gowder, Dr. James Heaton, as well as three additional members of the Gowder family in Union County.

Collins...from Page 1A

customer service. CEO Tony Thomas wrote me in January of 2015, that they "have some catching up to do in some areas" of my district, and yet despite this admission nothing has improved. As a recipient of federal funding, and preferred

tax status, Windstream is accountable to Congress, and their customers in Northeast Georgia, for their business practices. Customer service is not the problem -- I've talked to many qualified professionals who work for the company, who

understand that the real problems are with woefully inadequate infrastructure. Windstream can establish all the hotline phone numbers they want, but until they take their responsibility to rural communities seriously, I will continue to hold them accountable for how they spend federal funding."

Primary...from Page 1A

Further breakdown reveals that 2,020 people voted for Republican candidates, and only 412 voters opted for Democratic candidates.

Trump held a commanding lead in the county, capturing 46.11 percent of Republican votes with 1,369, followed by Marco Rubio with 611 votes at 20.58 percent of the vote, Ted Cruz with 592 votes at 19.94 percent, Ben Carson with 197 at 6.64 percent and John Kasich with 169 at 5.69 percent.

Jeb Bush, who suspended his presidential bid following his defeat in South Carolina, came in sixth with 10 votes and 0.34 percent of votes cast.

The margin between first and second place was much slimmer on the Democratic side, with Clinton winning 317 votes at 52.92 percent of the vote, to Bernie Sanders' 270 votes at 45.08 percent.

Statewide, Trump finished first with a double-digit lead in percentage points ahead of his GOP rivals, and Clinton also took the top spot with Democrats, getting more than double the votes cast for Sanders.

Overall, Republican candidates turned out half a million more voters than their Democratic counterparts -- 1,294,262 Georgia Republicans voted to the Democratic Party's 762,355, for a total voter turnout of 2,056,617 Georgia voters.

On the Republican side, Trump commanded a wide lead with 502,472 votes, or 38.82 percent of the state's Republican vote. Coming up a distant second was Rubio, with only 24.43 percent of the vote at 316,232 votes.

For the Democrats, Clinton won the contest handily, capturing 71.32 percent of the vote with 543,703 votes to Sanders' 214,769.

Also on Super Tuesday, Trump won contests in Vermont, Virginia, Alabama, Massachusetts, Tennessee and Arkansas, for a total of seven states. Cruz finished second behind Trump with three states, securing Alaska, Oklahoma and his home state of Texas. Rubio won one state, Minnesota.

Clinton and Sanders both made statements on Super Tuesday with their wins, with Clinton outstripping Sanders seven states to four. Clinton won in Georgia, Virginia, Alabama, Massachusetts, Tennessee, Texas and Arkansas. Sanders took home Vermont, Oklahoma, Minnesota and Colorado.

Unofficial Towns County Democratic Election Results							
Presidential Preference Primary March 1, 2016 • Votes By Precinct*							
Candidate	Young Harris	Tate City	Macedonia	Hiwassee	Absentee and Advance Voting included in Precinct Totals	TOTALS	Percentage
Democratic Presidential Candidate							
Hillary Clinton	82	0	44	63	10	113	52.88%
Martin O'Malley	2	0	0	3	0	2	1.19%
Bernie Sanders	115	0	43	46	7	266	45.08%
Michael Steinberg	1	0	2	2	0	5	0.85%
Total Democratic Voters						590	

Unofficial Towns County Republican Election Results								
Presidential Preference Primary March 1, 2016 • Votes By Precinct*								
Candidate	Young Harris	Tate City	Macedonia	Hiwassee	Absentee and Advance Voting included in Precinct Totals	TOTALS	Percentage	
Republican Presidential Candidate								
Jeb Bush	1	1	1	1	1	5	.34%	
Ben Carson	70	1	49	47	0	29	196	6.65%
Chris Christie	0	0	1	0	0	2	3	.10%
Ted Cruz	131	2	162	130	10	153	588	19.95%
Carly Fiorina	1	0	2	1	0	0	4	.14%
Lindsey Graham	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	.03%
Mike Huckabee	0	0	3	1	0	0	4	.14%
John R. Kasich	25	3	42	46	6	46	168	5.7%
George Pataki	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Rand Paul	5	0	1	2	0	1	9	.31%
Marco Rubio	141	4	110	119	23	211	608	20.63%
Rick Santorum	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Donald J. Trump	326	8	275	286	17	444	1356	46.01%
Total Republican Voters						2947		

Square...from Page 1A

corner of the square across from the light. And somebody decided they would plant a tree there, so they dug out the entire flowerbed and planted a tree. Now the tree's dead. So it was not a good idea. So they not only messed up a memory garden, but they killed a tree," she said.

Mitchell has a few ideas of what to do with the grant.

"Cut the dead trees down and put in a really nice Christmas tree. Someone has offered to give us \$250 toward the purchase of a new Christmas tree. And then look at what kind of trees that we can put in there that can give us color on a more year-round basis, and make it look appealing all the time," she said.

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